

Repentance Without Substance

In Albuquerque Metro there is a problem with judges letting criminals go and they commit more crimes against the citizens of New Mexico. Some claim the system is overloaded and broken, some claim the judges are lazy and do not want to put forth the effort to truly deal of those who are repeat offenders. Others say judges listen to the shallow offers of repentance by those charged with a crime and reduce sentences or let criminals go. There is probably a little truth to all these claims. There is one thing we do know; whether it is one of our children who we catch in a lie or doing something wrong or a criminal who has committed a crime they both often have the same reaction of confessing to reduce the punishment and most of the time these confessions are insincere. Some would never have confessed or repented if they had not been caught. This is the problem of the insincere repentance without repenting that chapter 6 of Hosea opens with. Israel's call to God is not sincere. Israel had sinned against God and had suffered for their disobedience, so they cry out in Verse 1, **"Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up."** (Hosea 6:1) Do you notice in this call to return to the LORD what is missing? What should be there if this was genuine repentance? The first thing missing in the act of repentance is stating what one is repenting about. There is no mention of their sins against God that brought his discipline against Israel. Jesus told a parable about those who make of show of repentance without repenting and those who truly repent. Reading from chapter 18 of Luke beginning in verse 10, **"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not**

like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ” The Pharisee lacked humility before God and hoped to exalt himself before God by putting down others. He was more concerned about his position and his show of outward righteousness than he was for the grace and mercy God offers to humble sinners. His show before God and those in the temple lacked a contrite heart. Jesus continues, ¹³ “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ” Here is a man who recognizes that he is a broken sinner and his only hope is God’s mercy. Jesus makes clear the standing of these 2 men before God, saying, ¹⁴ “I tell you, this man *the tax collector* went down to his house justified, rather than the *Pharisee* ~~other~~. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:10-14) Hosea’s Israel is arrogant and prideful just like the Pharisee. They see themselves as deserving of God’s mercy, just like the Pharisee, because they are the descendants of Abraham. Israel calls out to God in repentance without repenting.

This is the same problem we see today. Europeans and Americans say they are Christian by the mere fact they are born as Europeans and Americans – there is no need to have a relationship with God. If America is truly Christian then why does the crime rate continue to climb? If all those who claim to be Christian; according to Christianity Today this is 70.6% of the population of America or 228 million people and there are approximately 384,000 churches according to the latest figures for 2017, if these figures represent true Christians living life with a desire to honor and glorify God, should not American society be different? Should not the divorce rate be lower? Should not 71% of politicians be honest? Abortion outlawed? The crime rate should be the lowest in the world. For the majority can set the laws and vote people into office and according to Christianity Today nearly

¾ of Americans identify themselves as “Christian.” The problem could be brought into focus if we knew how many of these people regularly read the Bible and agree the Bible is the true Word of God. This was the problem of Hosea’s Israel – the country claimed to be followers of Yahweh but their lifestyles said just the opposite and this is the case with America today. This is the reason I have referred to what America calls “Christian Churches” as the “broad church” and the true Christian Church as the “narrow church” or the “remnant church.” The prophet Isaiah, a contemporary of Hosea is quoted by Paul in his letter to the Romans, “Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: **‘Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved,** ²⁸ **for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.’**” (Romans 9:27-28; Isaiah 10:22-23) Isaiah says and Paul confirms that the descendants of Abraham is of great number but only the remnant will be saved. Jesus also taught this truth as recorded by Matthew, **“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide or broad and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”** (Matthew 7:13-14) Jesus is saying whether one is speaking of Israel or America, true believers, not the 228 million people using the title “Christian” but the remnant will populate Christ’s true church. This is the reason Israel was in the mess it was in and the reason American is in the same mess today.

The second thing one can observe that is missing from the repentance of Israel found in the first 3 verses is they treat God like the gods of the other nations as a distant god that has no relationship directly with his creation. The true God - Yahweh is a God of relationship. In Joshua chapter 22 he spoke about his concern that the people’s lack of relationship with Yahweh. Paul also addressed this problem and says it so well, **“For if while we were enemies (*having no relationship with God*) we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son (*God establishes***

relationship with us through His Son, Jesus Christ), much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (Romans 5:10) God desires a relationship with his created children and was willing to have his Son die to establish relationships.

However, in chapter 6 and 7 there is no mention of the sins of Israel against God, there is no mention of the changes Israel must do to come back into relationship with God. In chapter 14 of Hosea there is a call for Israel to return to the Lord and repent but not here in chapters 6 and 7. The Israelites think they can control God on their own terms. This is wrong from 2 perspectives; first we cannot earn a relationship with God by works and second, the Israelites were simply insane to think as humans they can control or manipulate God. Israel was in serious danger to think that they can always count on God to forgive them when their repentance is a mere formality and not from a contrite heart that is grieved by ones sin.

This brings us to where we are today in America and much of the world for that matter. In the “broad church” the Bible is discounted and there is little awareness of sin and sin is no longer defined as God’s defines it. Sin no longer means rebellion against God and his righteousness. Churches no longer feel they have the right to call sin as sin and set biblical standards as they work to be all-inclusive. Jesus becomes a social reformer and learned teacher not the incarnate Son of the living and only God. Salvation ceases to mean living ones life for the glory of God and living in such a way as to honor God. Evangelism means showing people a better pattern for living life instead of submitting ones life to God. Under these terms repentance has little meaning or value. One can give to the church, serve in some ministry of the church and do “good deeds” but without a heart desiring to please God it is worthless. In the Revelation of John we read, *“Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”* True believers will strive to live righteous and holy. Then

Christ responds to what John heard him saying, ¹²“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.”

(Revelation 22:11-12) My beloved there is sin and there is right and wrong and because of the salvation God has given us we desire to live by God’s standards and this desire is one of the outward signs of genuine repentance and salvation.

Repentance Rejected

God tells us in these two chapters that the people are crying out to him, but he says this, “They do not cry to me from the heart, but they wail upon their beds; for grain and wine they gash themselves; they rebel against me.” (Hosea 7:14) They may call out to God, but God levies the same charge as in chapter 4, “There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land...” (Hosea 4:1) Israel felt they should have favor with God because of their ancestors. This is like saying I am a Christian because my parents are Christian. Hosea also says, the people had no “steadfast love” of God. God says this attitude is in truth insincere repentance and the people are demanding favor because of the history of Israel. Their shallow faith and insincere repentance is like the morning mist or dew found in chapter 13 of Hosea that quickly vanishes with the sun. When Joyce and I lived in Papua New Guinea it rained almost every night and the morning dew and fog made everything look grey. But as the sun came up the dew and mist disappeared to expose the brilliant hues of green and the many colors of flowers. God says the people’s love for him and the repentance of the Israelites is like the morning mist is has no substance and is a shadow of reality. The same is true of America. The true condition of both Israel and America’s hearts is exposed before God as false. The only reality that is eternal is found in God.

The second problem is that their remains no knowledge of God. Israel treats God like some distant god or the gods of the morning mist that is grey and fuzzy, but

they know not the true God. The people complain that they have repented and their repentance is evident in that they have offered sacrifices. Earlier in 4:13, “They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn offerings on the hills.” God responds in verse 6, “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Sacrifices were considered an essential part of religious life. But, God desires people’s hearts not ritual. Even Amos wrote that God declares, “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them...” (Amos 5:21-22) Isaiah writes the same thing, God is fed up with ritual that has become meaningless. God says through Isaiah, ¹¹ “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams ... ¹³ Bring no more vain offerings ... ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen ... Israel needed to quit making sacrifices until they repent and do as God instructs, ¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression ...” (Isaiah 1:11, 13, 15-17)

God’s 3rd and final charge against Israel is their unfaithfulness; they no longer live with faith in God. This rebellion is something that lies within mankind’s heart. It was inherited from Adam and unfaithfulness has plagued every generation and comes as no surprise to God. God does not excuse Israel, for it was Israel who chose to break the covenant with God. God does excuse America for it is the people who have chosen to live sinfully and have elected corrupt leaders to endorse their sinful lifestyles.

In Chapter 7 Hosea gives us 4 images to illustrate how God regards those who confess in his name but continue in their rebellion against him. The first is found in verses 4, 6 and 7, “They are all adulterers; they are like a heated oven ... ⁶ For

with hearts like an oven they approach their intrigue; all night their anger smolders ... ⁷ All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers ...” In both secular and biblical references an oven refers to the heat of sexual desires that drive the adulterer and if unchecked it is a fire and heat that will consume them. In Hosea this refers directly to Gomer as well as the physical and spiritual adultery of Israel. Our society says, “Just do it.” This attitude of pursuing whatever desires one has will lead our society to consume itself. This pattern of heated and unchecked lust and desire increases with intensity and speed until it will be like the meteorite hurling into the earth’s atmosphere burning up and it is consumed as it approaches the earth.

The second image is found in verse 8, “a cake not turned.” We would say a cake “half-baked”. A cake cooked on one side and raw on the other makes the eater sick. This suggests 2 things: first, Israel in her present state is as useless as a raw cake dough and second that her behavior could be said to make God sick. This brings to my mind the church at Laodicea, of which Jesus said, ¹⁵ “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.” (Revelation 3:15-16) This applies to many churches today; they are lukewarm by not teaching and living the Word of God and are therefore, like Israel and the church at Laodicea, they are as worthless as raw dough and when one bites down on raw dough they spit it out.

The 3rd image is in verse 11, “...like a dove, silly and without sense...” A dove brings thoughts of beauty and symbolizes peace. But this is not what a dove represents here. This dove is Israel that has become easily deceived and senseless. I remember when Joyce was driving and going down the street slowly and she began to brake for there were 2 doves in the middle of the lane. I told her to move ahead and the doves would fly away. But they did not and she ran over them.

There was 2 problems, first Joyce listen to me and second the doves were “[silly and without sense](#)”. Having forsaken God who was there only true security, Israel now turns to Egypt and Assyria who cannot save Israel and this decision was without sense. Their turning from God will result in his saying of Israel, ¹²“[I will spread over them my net; I will bring them down like birds of the heavens; I will discipline them according to the report made to their congregation.](#)” ¹³ [Woe to them, for they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me! I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me.](#)” Israel who once knew God has lost their way and have become like doves that are silly and without sense and they have become corrupt in the process. They worshiped false gods, and progressively led more and more sinful lifestyles based on pleasure seeking and lusts. Reminds me of our own society. How about you, what does it remind you of?

The last image is in verse 16, “[They return, but not upward; they are like a treacherous bow; their princes shall fall by the sword because of the insolence of their tongue.](#)” A faulty or treacherous bow is not only useless in battle but it is dangerous to the archer. The one who places their trust in such a weapon will fall to their enemy or as verse 16 says, “[their princes shall fall by the sword](#)” for they have no functioning weapon to fight with. Israel has placed its trust in the surrounding countries that in truth only sought to devour them. They have placed their trust in gods of wood and stone and they are as worthless as a faulty bow. What is America placing its trust in? What are we placing our trust in?

Authentic Repentance

Israel was in a mess and it placed itself on a course of destruction. What is there to be done? The Bible teaches that Israel did nothing and their destruction came. However, that does not have to be the fate of our own nation. For Israel and for

our nation the answer was simple enough, repent and turn back to God. Israel chose not to repent. What will America choose? Chapter 6 opens with an insincere call of repentance but Hosea's prophecy closes with a genuine call for repentance. Reading from chapter 14, beginning at verse 1, "Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. ² Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, 'Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. ... *God replies,* ⁴ I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them." This is what is needed by our nation, our cities, and our churches and by the people; first, confess our sin and repent and appeal to God on the basis of his mercy and grace. John made the problem and solution clear, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9) Paul also spoke about the needed condition of the heart, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." (Romans 10:9-10) My beloved, stand with me and say the doxology with me, not as ritual, but with hearts that believe.